



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD SPENCE

H.R. 4 The National Missile Defense Act of 1999

I yield myself such time as I may consume and ask unanimous consent to revise and extend my remarks.

Mr. Speaker, the American public has been lulled into assuming that they are defended against a ballistic missile attack. The truth is, they are not.

The threat of ballistic missile attack is real, and it is here today. Last summer, an independent study by the bipartisan Rumsfeld Commission unanimously concluded that the ballistic missile threat to the United States "is broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly" than anticipated, and that the U.S. may have "little or no warning" of a ballistic missile attack. With each passing day, our nation's vulnerability to missile attack grows. Rogue nations like North Korea, Libya, Iran and Iraq are working aggressively to acquire the capability to strike the American homeland with ballistic missiles carrying weapons of mass destruction.

I am confident that the more than 200 members who attended the Rumsfeld Commission's extraordinary classified briefing here on the House floor back in March have a much greater appreciation of the need to move forward with missile defenses and of the reason why we need to make the kind of commitment that we are making in this bill.

Let me briefly make a few points.

First, contrary to intelligence estimates that predicted the ballistic missile threat was more than a decade away, the missile threat to the United States is real, and it is real today.

(More)

Second, technology has matured to the point where moving forward and deploying a national missile defense system is feasible. There will always be test failures and there will always be technological challenges. But Americans have never shied away from a challenge, and certainly never in the face of a threat that gets worse every day.

Third, the cost of a national missile defense system, by the Administration's own estimates, will comprise less than one percent of the overall defense budget, and less than two percent of our military modernization budget over the next five years. The cost to deploy an initial National Missile Defense capability will amount to less than the amount the U.S. has spent on peacekeeping deployments over the past 6 years. This strikes me as a small price and a sound investment.

Mr. Speaker, national missile defense is necessary, feasible, and affordable. But in spite of the growing consensus that the threat is real and that technology is maturing, the Administration has steadfastly refused to commit to actually *deploy* a national missile defense. H.R. 4 addresses the Administration's unexplainable lack of commitment in this regard and represents the Congress's bipartisan belief that all Americans should be protected against ballistic missiles.

I urge my colleagues' support for this important bill and reserve the balance of my time.

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